

ERIE-NIAGARA REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP

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Co-Chairs:

Hon. Clyde Burmaster
Hon. Barry Weinstein, MD

MBE / WBE Project Group Minutes

Meeting 1 – August 29, 2006

Members:

James Allen
Hon. Vince Anello
Colleen DiPirro
Tim Doolittle
Hon. Wright Ellis
Matthew Enstice
Andrew Eszak
Samuel Ferraro
Hon. Joel Giambra
Hon. Timothy Kennedy
Hon. Kathy Konst
David Lacki
Celeste Lawson
Gregory Lewis
Hon. Cynthia Locklear
Hon. Peter McMahon
Hon. John Mills
Hal Morse
Jo Nasoff-Finton
Hon. Sean O'Connor
John Percy
Dr. Gary Praetzel
Melinda Rath Sanderson
David Roll
Hon. William Ross
Diane Ruzala
Laura St. Pierre Smith
Christopher Schoepflin
Hector Titus
Timothy Wanamaker
Peter Wendel

Present:

Hector Titus (Chair)
Michelle Barron
Michael Casale
Tracey Houston
Gerald McDuffie
Mohamed Mohamed

Hon. Crystal Peoples
Richard Pino
Laura St. Pierre Smith
Jackie Stover
Hon. Antoine Thompson
Tod Kniazuk (Administrator)

Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership (ENRP) Economic Development Subcommittee Chair Hector Titus welcomed the group. Those in attendance introduced themselves and the organizations they represent.

ENRP Administrator Tod Kniazuk gave the group background information about the organization and its work on economic development and small business issues. The concept of strengthening the MBE / WBE process was brought up in the subcommittee, which led to this group being brought together to discuss the issue. Specific ideas and projects would only be undertaken if those involved in MBE /WBE certification were interested in pursuing them in cooperation with ENRP. With that, Kniazuk asked the group for their perceptions of the process.

Ad Hoc:

Michael Casale
Lawrence Witul

Administrator:

Tod A. Kniazuk

Michael Casale (Niagara County Center for Economic Development) explained that in Niagara County there is no place to go to certify. The county sends people to Empire State Development, but Casale asked if there is some other place they should be sent or if Niagara County should have its own portal.

Tracey Houston (Buffalo Niagara Partnership) noted that they have a diversity supplier program.

Gerald McDuffie (Empire State Development) replied to Casale that ESD has a relationship with the SBDC at NCCC. He added that ESD

doesn't make determinations at the regional office, but they do site visits and try to expedite the process.

McDuffie explained that Buffalo and Erie County also use the ESD application, but that applicants still have to fill out separate applications because while the three use the same application, they have different certification processes. He continued that there could be some sort of "temporary certification" if one process is successfully completed.

The Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority, because they receive federal funds, uses the federal certification process. That entails a "disadvantaged" designation instead of MBE / WBE. Richard Pino (NFTA) added that as of 11/30/05 they are under a Unified Certification Program; once you get certified by the NFTA you are also certified for the New York State Department of Transportation, the Port Authority, and the MTA of New York and New Jersey.

Michelle Barron (Buffalo Economic Renaissance Corporation) noted that BEREC makes referrals to Buffalo and Erie County, but does not certify themselves.

Mohamed Mohamed (New York State Department of Transportation) offered the opinion that getting certified is easier at the county level than at the state level, as it's a more detailed process with the state. He also said that access to information could be a possible project area; some kind of "one stop shopping" for people to get information and know all the different certifiers that are out there.

McDuffie suggested that perhaps a "first stop" is a better idea than a "one stop."

New York State Assemblymember Crystal Peoples explained that prior to the reauthorization of Section 15A (which requires MBE / WBE opportunities) herself and fellow Assembly members RoAnn Destito and Darryl Towns held public hearings across the state to hear from businesses and found that certification really needs to be streamlined to make it less time consuming. Assemblymember Destito introduced legislation to begin working on the issue to determine what level of government is the right one to be the lead certifier, and who would go along with a unified certification. In the Senate David Patterson was the sponsor of the MBE legislation that passed this year. Under the legislation one certification would be

good all across New York, perhaps with Empire State Development as the responsible agency.

Kniazuk summed up that there are three components to examine:

1. Access to information and review of qualifications,
2. Intake mechanism (the application),
3. Certification process.

Changing the process will require legislation, and so while that is a goal and we should support efforts to make those changes, for our working group perhaps concentrating on the first two components would make for a good short-term effort. McDuffie added that procurement advocacy is another issue, as there is a need to measure the participation in these programs.

The next meeting was set for Tuesday, September 26 at 9 a.m. at the Erie County Industrial Development Agency (275 Oak St. Suite 150, Buffalo).

For the next meeting, the group was asked to answer the four questions at the bottom of their agenda:

1. The requirements for certification: who's eligible, how long does it take to certify, what assistance do you provide in the process, do you do or require site visits?
2. Why is certification important in your scope of work?
3. What is your certification process?
4. Who governs your certification process (i.e. federal, state mandates)?

Titus thanked the group for their attendance and participation, and noted that there seems to be good work underway and a willingness to continue to advance the issue.